

July 1, 1989

Dear Mary Ruth,

Thanks for taking the time to write to me. Your concerns about my health are certainly appreciated. After a very difficult period last fall and winter (I was hospitalized 7 times between August '88 and May '89) I am enjoying a period of relative well-being. I am still physically challenged on a daily basis with several chronic infections, but nothing life-threatening. My energy level, though not normal, is much improved over what it was a few months ago.

I see myself as a person living with AIDS rather than dying with AIDS. I have never accepted my diagnosis as an automatic death sentence, and I have no intention of dying of AIDS. I realize that that possibility exists, but I also realize that there is a growing number of "survivors"—people who are completely well and on no medications or treatments 5 to 7 years after diagnosis.

I have never experienced rejection or poor treatment as a result of having AIDS. On the contrary, my experience has been to receive a tremendous out-pouring of love and support from relatives, friends, acquaintances, and sometimes even total strangers. I believe that love heals. The task is learning how to love and to be loved, forgive oneself and others. I find that as one prepares for death, one's life improves. Ironically, the best years of my life have been since my diagnosis. In spite of the excitement and challenge in my life these days, there is also a peacefulness and contentment that feels very good.

Over most of the past twenty years I have worked very hard as a gay activist for fair laws and equal treatment of gay/lesbian persons. I have founded organizations to provide community services, led demonstrations in the streets and in the halls of government. I have raised money and volunteered my services in the care of people with AIDS. My activism always seemed the natural and sensible thing to do in the face of problems that we gay folks encounter on a daily basis. It has been very rewarding work, often producing very positive and desirable changes. It has also enhanced my skills as a writer, speaker and a thinker. Further, it has brought me into contact with many fine people, gay and non-gay, from the news media to elected officials. I have also landed in jail a few times for my efforts.

As a result of the above, my community has rallied around me and looked after me in ways that I never could have imagined since I announced my diagnosis. When I am ill, weak, or short of breath, someone is always there to grocery shop, wash my clothes or car, prepare food, do house work, etc. It is very comforting to know that I will never be alone or abandoned. Further, my community has bestowed upon me every honor that they have to give. So how could I ask for more? I've enclosed an article from a local gay paper which reports on one such honor a few weeks ago.

Mary Ruth, I hope that you will not think of me as a dying person. I am doing better than most people dared hope a year ago. We all must die sometime, and as result of all of this I feel that I am more prepared for life or death than most folks. My life has been very exciting and full and if it ends tomorrow, I have no regrets. However, I have a lot of work to do and I don't expect to leave before that work is done.

My regards to you. I am grateful for your close contact with my mother and for your support of her. She thinks the world of you. She is a great lady.

Love to you,

Jess (Bob)